

## The Workshop

# Using narratives to support Porirua City Council's Transport Strategy

## Why use a Narratives for Change approach?

Narratives for Change is a strategic approach that works to deepen public understanding so that more people support changes that make the biggest difference. When working to improve outcomes for all people and the environment (public good) people need to understand the underlying problems to be addressed. Through the Narratives for Change approach we can help people see how proposed solutions can contribute to achieving their collective motivations and goals. Which can lead to more people constructively engaging with, and acting in support of, proposed actions.

Just providing information and facts will not achieve the change we are working towards. This is because understanding and support for public good is shaped by strong cultural forces, especially by the narratives people use to influence people's thinking (see sidebar). Too often the narratives and mindsets used by people, both intentionally and unintentionally, make it hard to see the shared values and knowledge the wider community holds and prioritises. Which makes it hard to shift us towards necessary action for public good.

The strategic purpose of using narratives for change is to ensure people in the public and decision makers have the opportunity to hear narratives that reflect our shared collective goals and knowledge, for the purpose of public good. Using and amplifying these narratives creates a space for more people from a wider range of communities to be heard, and a space for more people to hear about, and engage more deeply and more wisely, on the issues at hand.



## Narratives for Change

A set of communication and engagement tools to support organisations making significant policy, practice, structural and cultural shifts for public good. These evidence-based tools connect issues to people's core collective motivations and goals, deepen their understanding of the case for change, and inspire support for the shifts that are needed.

## Shared mindsets

Shared mindsets are how people collectively think and reason about big issues in our lives. Shared mindsets shape how people respond to information, as well as policy choices, systems and structures that we live with and whether we accept or reject necessary changes to them.

## Shared narratives

Shared narratives are a pattern of meaning in our communications — a golden thread woven through our stories. The pattern of meaning reflects our shared mindsets. Narratives have values — our core human motivations — embedded within them. The narratives that dominate public conversation influence the shared mindsets that we draw upon. Those who hold narrative power can monopolise the public and decision makers' reasoning, and have a significant role in shaping systems and our lives for better or worse.

# How to use narratives in active and public transport communications

There are two key steps to using narratives effectively in active and public transport communications. The first is to become familiar with and avoid the unhelpful narratives that undermine support for active and public transport. Once you know which narratives to avoid, you can then replace these unhelpful narratives with helpful narratives that work to deepen public understanding and build support for active and public transport.

## 1 Become familiar with and avoid the unhelpful narratives that undermine support for active and public transport

The following narratives bring to the surface individualistic and short term ways of thinking. They make it hard to see, understand and support changes towards public and active transport.

*We need to recognise them and avoid them, including in our own communications.*

### Fatalism about government action, climate action, public transport

Fatalistic mindsets and narratives appear frequently in issues where government, transport and climate and environmental issues intersect. Fatalism was the dominant unhelpful narrative heard in focus groups.

In general fatalism is the belief that the system we have now is inevitable and that problems are too big, too complex, and too serious to be solved. Alongside this is a sense that the people in government or society won't act. Fatalism gets in the way of seeing how many of our systems have been designed and implemented by people and can be redesigned. It saps people's sense of hope, agency and optimism, leading to disengagement.

**Transport fatalism** – is the belief that the car centric system is inevitable, and would create too many negative impacts to shift. It makes it hard to see the harms from the current transport system, harms like injuries to children, that conflict with our shared goals and values. It also hides the many effective alternatives that meet our shared goals. As advocates, we inadvertently cue this thinking when we frame vehicle centred planning and cities, and use words like “car centric”, “getting rid of cars”, “removing car parks” instead of the alternative we are working towards e.g people centred transport.

**Climate fatalism** – the belief that it's too late, too hard to act on climate disruption, and no one in governments and business will act. It dampens people's sense that they can act and make a difference, and knowledge about effective action. We bring to the surface this thinking when we use “crisis and fear” frames about climate change, and focus on the risks without making concrete the solutions and better lives we can build. It sounds like “act now before it's too late”, “it will cost a lot more later if we don't”. These frames and words can raise awareness but do so at expense of agency, efficacy and ability to act effectively. Climate fatalism was less prominent in focus groups than transport fatalism.

**Governmental fatalism** – the belief that people in local and central government won't and don't act in service of our communities greatest needs. It is tied up with a lack of trust, a sense of not having concerns and desires heard and considered, and experiences of exclusion from meaningful decision making. Governmental fatalism was expressed in focus groups as 'previous projects have not worked and so future projects will also not work'. There was a distinction that the fatalism was being directed at the project and not at Porirua City Council as an organisation. There was also a dominant theme specifically about bus services in Porirua, that they are unreliable (don't turn up on time, if at all) and they are unsafe or unpleasant experiences.

As communicators, we inadvertently engage this thinking when we talk about government as "the other" or separate from the communities they represent. And when we link a failure to act in the past with an inevitably around failure to act in the future eg "You can't rely on the government to do this work".

### **Individualism**

The belief that the problems we have are best solved through individuals choosing to shift their behaviours, often consumer behaviours. It distracts people from seeing how structures and systems are key to shaping and reshaping people's behaviours. It limits people's understanding of the collective problems and solutions. We reinforce this mindset when we frame individual behaviour change, tell stories of individuals doing the hard or right thing, and when we use words like "choose", "buy", "make the hard choice", and talk about people as "consumers".

### **Freedomism**

The belief that current carbon based car-centric systems give us independence, freedom and enjoyment. In focus groups there was a specific version of freedomism – having a car and making car journeys is an extension of personal space, providing freedom from the other spaces people spend time in that may be full of other people.

Any changes are impediments to free will, individual choice and preferences. Freedomism prevents people from seeing the greater freedoms that the system inhibits; good health, clean air, the fun and ease of alternative modes of travel. We cue this thinking when we frame the loss people need to expect from transport and climate disruption solutions, and use words like "give up our way of life", "making the hard decisions", or "we have to change our way of life".

### **Them versus us (otherism)**

The belief that there are people who are fundamentally different and "other" from "us". In transport and climate these "others" are seen as a threat to our way of life, and to benefit from particular transport changes (eg bike lanes), at the expense of "our" needs (being able to drive). It obscures the experiences of excluded groups such as children, disabled people, while dampening down shared desires and benefits of a climate and people friendly transport system.

We heard a version of us vs them being expressed in focus groups in terms of the places people live and spend their time, neighbourhoods being fundamentally different and other from us.

We cue this thinking when we differentiate people particularly by their mode of transport eg "car drivers", "cyclists", or we address the concerns of businesses, but not communities currently harmed.

## 2 Shift to using these four helpful narratives in your communication

Shift to using narratives that are more helpful to understanding the needs for active and public transport. These narratives need to reflect the core values and motivations of your community to create a space for deeper and more inclusive engagement and communications.

Note the following narratives include the values and motivations that people in Porirua have highlighted as mattering to them. They align to the vision, values and priorities outlined in Maungaroa 2050 Māori Strategy and Ola Kamataga – Beginning of Life 2024–2027.

### Narrative 1. “Imagine the life all of us can live”

This narrative describes the better life a changed transport system offers all of us. It draws on the collective values and vision heard in conversation with communities. It names the better life explicitly, in everyday and collective terms. It frames the desire many of us have for something more for our communities works to counter fatalistic and othering narratives.

#### Amplify

- ✓ Talking about **people’s shared desires** for communities (and by extension transport systems and infrastructure) that prioritise being connected to each other, care for each other and the places they love.
- ✓ **Show people** in clear every day ways the communities people want to live in and how shifts to transport systems enable that.
- ✓ Remind people of the **value they place on children living an independent and free life** and how it is feasible to make that happen.

#### Avoid

- ✗ Leading with fear, risk and loss. This includes talking first and foremost about the transport, health and climate risks we face from maintaining the current system.
- ✗ Avoid these terms that dehumanise and “other” people: eg cyclists, car drivers, pedestrians.

### Make stories easy to hear and share: use a vision and values led story structure

Use a vision and values led story structure for each communication to make it easy for people open to understanding to hear and share. Follow up your vision and values with a clear explanation – one that names barriers, agents of action, and links the solutions back to the vision and values people have.

### Example story – Imagine the life all of us can live

In Porirua many of us want a place where it is easy for our children to move about independently and safely, and where our streets are as vibrant and welcoming as our people.

Right now, our transport system only has one gear and it means we have to rely heavily on cars and trucks to transport ourselves and goods. It makes our communities less welcoming, unsafe for kids and young people, and hard for many of us to get around. We need more transport gears.

To create the sorts of connected and caring places many of us value in Porirua for our communities, we are providing more options for public and active transport.

### Helpful terms and explanatory metaphors to use in your communications

**People** who want to ride, **people** who want to walk, **people** who want to take a bus – to humanise and create connection

**Opening/open our streets to people** – to describe the process of putting in bike lanes, changing design for walkers

Providing more **options** – to describe bike lanes, more buses and public and active transport solutions

Use the **right tools** for the job – to explain why we would shift away from cars and trucks in cities

We need more **gears in our transport system** – to talk about public and active transport being added in and car parks for example being removed.

## Narrative 2. “Everyone will get their transport needs met”

This equity narrative frames the transport needs of excluded communities, in particular disabled people, older people, children, and people on low incomes. It helps explain to people how the current transport system shapes people’s lives in negative ways, including through trips not taken for example. It works to counter individualism narratives.

### Amplify

- ✓ Talking about how our transport creates the options for all people to live the lives they want.
- ✓ Explain how lack of options limits all people, inconveniences, and harms everyone, especially disabled people and children.
- ✓ Provide concrete examples of where rebuilding / redesign has made people’s lives easier.

### Avoid

- ✗ Talking about individuals needing to change their behaviour, make better transport choices or decisions, or why more people need to care.

#### Example story – “Everyone will get their transport needs met”

Living in Porirua is all about being connected to each other and our important places. Our streets and transport systems need to work so everyone can have those connections.

Right now, many people, including children, young people and disabled people, find it harder to take part in school, work, church, or to go and have fun, because our streets are just too difficult to get around.

At the council we are providing more public transport options for disabled people, and people in our communities who don’t drive. We’re opening our streets to make it easier and safer for all people to get around Porirua.

By creating space on our streets for people who use wheelchairs, bikes, scooters, or who walk, and by creating more space for easy-to-use, friendly and reliable public transport, we can make our cities great places where everyone is connected to the people and places that are important to them.

### **How to talk about equity – avoiding the jargon**

Equity is an outcome we get when we meet everyone's needs. Using the word equity is not enough of an explanation for people who don't yet understand what equity is. Most people think about equity in financial terms, eg equity in a house.

One way to help connect people with the idea of equity and to create an opening for them to consider solutions that create equity, is to talk about it in two parts.

1. The vision - we want everyone to get what they need
2. The path to get there – different supports to meet different groups needs

#### *That may sound like:*

"We want all people to be able to get where they need to go easily and in a way that is healthy for them and the environment. That means we need to address the unfair and unjust transport systems that mean people who are disabled simply have few or no options available to them."

### Narrative 3. Caring for the places we love

Caring for the places people love is a narrative that counters individualism and freedom narratives. It is designed to link transport systems with people's core motivations for caring for and protecting their natural environment and climate.

#### Amplify

- ✓ Talk about caring for the people and places we love.
- ✓ Start with concrete opportunities that come from action. This gives hope and a vision for what is possible and overcomes the sense that nothing can be done.
- ✓ Deepen people's understanding of transport and climate change solutions by explaining how shifting our transport systems locally is a climate solution that works. Use terms like "carbon pollution" and metaphors like "heat trapping blanket" to explain how carbon pollution from cars and other transport works to heat the planet and the impacts it has on all of us.

#### Avoid

- ✗ Leading with the harm and extensive risks we are facing. Focussing on lifestyle and behavioural changes people can make. Telling people they need to change.

#### Example story – caring for the places we love

In Porirua many of us want to live in ways that care for the many places we love here. Greener streets to support our precious bird life, clear waterways and beaches and a healthy harbour full of kai, and clean air for our children to breathe in all our neighbourhoods. This is the Porirua of the future.

Creating this future means acting now to protect people and places from harm. Part of the solution is solving the transport problems that contribute to many health and environmental problems for our people.

There are many transport tools we can use that contribute to our own and the planet's health. Tools like biking, walking, and buses or trains which reduce the carbon and other pollution going into our air, water and soil. At the council we are making it easier for people to use these transport tools by making streets more welcoming for walking, putting in protected bike lanes, and creating space for buses.

Helping people use these tools more often in Porirua helps us live in ways that care for the many places we love here.



## Narrative 4. Preparing for the big stuff

The preparing for the big stuff narrative focuses on naming yourself, as representatives of communities, as having responsibility to listen and plan for the long term good for the whole community, especially those with less power and resources. It works to overcome fatalism and individualism narratives and some of the distrust people feel towards governments. It builds a sense of efficacy, as well as an understanding of who can act to do what.

### Amplify

- ✓ Talking about planning for the big stuff.
- ✓ Name people in government as the agents who need to act pragmatically and respond well now to prevent things getting worse.
- ✓ Give specific examples of people in government, business, iwi, hapū and communities working together on effective solutions.
- ✓ Use terms like public good, planning for the long term and rebuilding infrastructure of care, connection and contribution.
- ✓ Name people in council as part of the communities they are working for.

### Avoid

- ✗ Talking about communities needing to fend or prepare for themselves, or not to expect people in government to help.

#### **Example story – “Planning for the big stuff”**

As the council plans for the big challenges we all face, including a disrupted climate, the responsible thing to do is take action for our city now that ensures the wellbeing of our future generations. In Porirua, one responsible approach is to choose transport solutions that will secure our communities’ long-term wellbeing.

Currently our city is geared towards cars and other vehicles that harm our health and the health of our environment in too many ways. Just like riding up a hill we need more gears in our transport system.

We are taking practical steps to open our streets for people to walk, ride a bike, or get a bus. Making these things the easiest transport options benefits our health, improves the quality of the air our children breathe, and protects our environment. It is the practical and responsible thing to do.

# Five tips when communicating about people and climate positive transport systems in Porirua

## **Listen to how people describe the lives they want to live and how transport enables and prevents it**

Collecting and using this type of data will provide you with important information for your design choices. In your communications you can reflect back to people how those design choices were informed by listening to people's vision and values.

For example, ask people to set out a vision for their communities in concrete everyday terms.

We don't just want to survive the next century, we want to thrive. Ask people what thriving looks like, how their day to day lives could be better.

Ask people about what matters to them. Include what people think matters as individuals, as well as what wellbeing looks like for the collective (however they define that). Don't be afraid that this will divide. Rather have faith (based in research) that when people are asked what matters to them it is a powerful force for them to realise their desire to contribute to how their community is structured, and have those contributions recognised by the community.

## **Seek to understand the transport barriers people experience in terms of achieving what matters to them**

Asking how transport prevents or enables the life people want to live helps you to further assess appropriate solutions that should be offered. Later it helps you connect the proposed solutions to the lives people want to live — as opposed to just proposing solutions that are the most sensible or pragmatic or cost effective.

All proposed solutions will be subject to opposition. Ensure your solutions directly respond to the barriers people experience to the things that matter the most in their lives. This provides a solid foundation for decision makers to understand how the work meets the needs of the broader community.

## **Consistently connect options with what matters to people (their core values), in both collective and individual terms**

Use your communications to show how the different options proposed meet people's core motivations of children's independence, caring for the environment and each other.

In engagement and consultation about the solutions, link what people said about what matters to them collectively to the solutions being proposed. Show how their contribution was taken seriously. Explain the link between the solutions and their values.

*For example:*

People in Porirua told us that ensuring their kids could move independently and safely around while walking was part of a caring and connected community. We noted that street structures currently prioritise the movement of cars, which is putting too many children at risk of being injured by cars and trucks. The solutions proposed work to open our streets to more children walking and riding independently and safely in your community.

## **Explain the link between climate change action (protecting the environment) and public and active transport design**

Make it clear and easy for people to understand how our current transport system design and function works to encourage carbon pollution and other polluting emissions. Show how the transport plan and options work to prevent climate change from getting worse by reducing carbon pollution from transport. For example, don't simply say cars produce carbon pollution, talk about the way the current systems design makes it hard to use anything except a car.

## **Show don't tell**

Our brains find it easier to grasp the concrete and shy away from things that are abstract. In communications give as many concrete examples as possible to show how the council is meeting their responsibility to plan for big things, and meet the motivations of the community.